

EDGE CITY

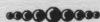
1998



Mansfield University's
Literary Magazine

Welcome to Mansfield University's
literary magazine *Edge City*. This publication
is a collection of poetry, short stories, and creative
writing by students at Mansfield.
And it's free!

Edge City Staff



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Edge City
is
the border between present and
future, life and death, where the
power and hermeticism of
technological advancement
combine with the squalor, dirt, and
danger of everyday street life. It
surfaces in cyberpunk culture as a
gritty hipness, an avant garde sense
of newness mixed with a degree of
precariousness and peril.
It is the New Frontier.

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Last year I saw that *Edge City* was accepting submissions. Someone had taken on the project of *Edge City* once again. I was excited and carefully chose some work to submit. However, I never heard back. The magazine never even materialized. It upset me so much that I decided to investigate the matter. After talking to some people, I set out to revive the magazine, which hasn't been published since the spring semester of 1995.

At the beginning of this school year, I gave a plea for help to anyone who wanted to assist in the magazine. Fortunately, I found some takers and the project proceeded; however, we didn't really know what we were doing. None of us had any previous experience with publishing. Indeed, the whole thing was a learning process. I think we handled it well, though. And I'm proud of what we have accomplished. I thank everyone who helped along the way.

But to make this magazine successful, I needed the help of the entire student body. The magazine needed submissions. I didn't know what to expect and kept my fingers crossed. By the submission deadline, I breathed a sigh of relief for we had received over seventy submissions. So this is my big thank you to all of you who submitted work. THANK YOU. Without you the magazine would have been nothing. The staff enjoyed reading everyone's submissions, and it's unfortunate that we can't publish everything. It's good to know there are so many people at Mansfield putting their thoughts on paper. Keep writing. For those of you who didn't submit, I encourage you to do so in the future.

Finally, I hope that everyone enjoys this issue of *Edge City*. The staff and I put a lot of time and effort into it. You'll find it's quite an eclectic mix. I also urge everyone to not let this magazine slip into obscurity once again.

Sincerely,
Aaron Sinkovich

Ruth Rawson

On Reading Poetry

Some poems come quickly
Like summer lightning—
Everything trapped by light.
You blink,
Eyes opening
To echoing darkness
And fading images.

Some poems come slowly,
Softly tug on your soul
Then gently etch themselves
Into your being.
Seeping through you
Like morning mists;
They become your bones.

Nichole R. Smith

Coffee Cafe

smart chick
alienated by academic loneliness
eyes a bohemian slacker
poring over Nietzsche
amid the rich aromas
of cinnamon and amaretto
casually
she eases up to him

and despairs as he
kisses the pretty waitress

Celeste Fanelli

more matriarchy, deal with it.

It is time now to burn
the bibles and rebuild our
stone temples of the
Goddess. Silence every
patriarchal utter with
division, to do it with
torture and annihilation!,
obviously stops anything
our world is round. and
whole. and pure. *

and rockin' like jazzy
cat phat. word up
Philly NY Newyork
jungle streets knappy
tearin' down the concrete
squattin' from the inside
out Babylon's crumblin'
reach out for the wood
(she provides us!)

Our "new" society's building
in the process NOW
like WOW, Women's Now
my belly is so alive, all thru you.

Traci Persing

The Mistreated

She used her good side
to maneuver her wheelchair
down the long hallway
to greet me on the mornings
when I arrived
She cried a lot
something about a baby
and her sister
She laughed at me
When I did not decipher correctly
her verbal instruction
regarding how to bathe her
how to dress her
I wasn't like Sally
who died on the inside
when her son was in that crash
She poured pee on their plants
and disregarded anyone's instruction intentionally

I wanted to tell her
I am here
I am not Sally
The baby is gone
Your sister doesn't show
I am here

Jeanie Simpson

Finding a Voice

Trickled a river from my mouth
Splashing terrain I'd known all my life,
Yet never my feet had stood.
Rigid stones unabiding,
Once dry, brutal, and coarse—no longer.
Grave land unforgiving,
Once dry, brutal, and coarse—no longer.
Now strong, fierce currents engulf the lands,
Sweeping all her desires into her fold.
Newly liberated water free from her prison wall,
Free from calculated sweat cemented by a man,
Who knew nothing but to create dams
Attempting to control Mother's daughter,
Attempting to overpower what will not be.
Chip by chip to his grey wall her soft arms strained
Until, one crack tediously led to another, until . . .
Passion was set free in a land of sharp edged man.

Debbie Chilson

Hunter

Dark. A sky not black, but purple
A violet tinged with the light of the sun
A dark purple that gives way to gray
Silence. A silence in which there is noise
Nature loud, revelling in its quietness
The wind whistles caressing the trees
Squirrels chattering as they play in them
Branches clatter and tap with motion
Sun brings gray to the morning sky
Lighting the white blanket that covers earth
Calm is the valley that wakes from nightly slumber
Winter birds greet the day with sweet songs
Twigs snap among the gray and brown brambles
A flicker of motion reveals a white cloud, then more
An army of low flying clouds, beautiful white tails
Bounding with ease over the ground, light and sure
The moment when man and Nature unite
When a heart beats to the sound of thundering hooves
Angels garbed in brown and orange on a field of white
Bound together in one fleeting second of understanding

Logan M. Newman

Walking Forward

I walk,
with subtle gait,
moving foot in front of foot.

I study the pavement,
searching for the cracks,
like the ones in my life.

My movement is forward

And away.

My troubles are behind me

And away.

I continue to move,

though the movement is painful.

I continue to walk,

though the cracks stub my toes,

and try to convince me to stop.

I continue to walk

and leave it all behind.

David Banyar

How the Author Envisions Pangloss's Interpretation of Jim Morrison

Cool Metallic Skin

(H₂O) Repellant, Chain-mail Armour

Dark glassy Black holes

Claws;

You speak with a Forked tongue

Get the hell out of here with all

this sub-human lizard man bullshit

Aaron Sinkovich

The Bulldozer

The bulldozer comes
Clearing a path through the woods
Where children played in the day
And ran home from in the night.

It comes again and again,
Knocking down tall trees
Where masses of black birds roosted,
Changing the landscape,
Erasing dirt trails worn into the earth
By bikes with seats that kept rising.

Gears grinding and churning,
The ground is turned inside out
And mighty trunks lay defeated
Showing their roots
That once supported tree-forts,
Each better than the last,
Built by boy architects
With scrap lumber and nails
Hauled through the brush to a secret location.

It comes,
Crashing through the terrain,
Closing in on the spot
Where four boys discovered the opposite sex
In the pages of magazines,
Dirty, ragged, and torn,
Found hidden amongst the leaves
Damp upon the soil
Littered nearby with pieces of glass
Shattered by BB guns.

Faster and faster it comes
With huge iron claws,
Ending adventure,
Ripping large wounds in the ground
Travelled by by three youths
Who spotted a deer or pheasant
On their way to fish in the creek beyond.

Hungry for the virgin earth,
Here it comes again,
Its stomach growling,
The metal monster screaming,
"Development!, Development!, Development!,"
Tearing everything naked,
Overpowering,
Dismembering,
Swallowing future memories forever.

Nichole R. Smith

Damaged Goods

Two band-aids.

One staple.

Spackle and dry wall on the huge crack in the center.

The orange warning signs:

-Under construction

-Caution

-You break it, you buy it.

Lub dub. Lub dub.

My heart's still beating.

It's a little battered,

a little bruised,

a little tender in spots,

But it's still beating.

The foreman's concerned, though.

"One more crack and this whole thing's gonna break."

I stare at my heart as you cradle it in your hands.

Be real careful with that, okay?

It's the only one I've got.

Michele Somerville

Oedipus Rex

was much maligned,
a tragic figure
from a far away time.

Sophocles' tale

later filled a void
and provided a scapegoat
for Sigmund Freud.

This story of passion
so rife with insurgence
would be brought to you today
by laundry detergents!

Bert Bones

Loud

abRUPT

And deep

is the sound
of A THUMP!

Hollow

ROUND

and (enclosed)
it echoes UP!!!

Ruth Rawson

Oceanside Portrait

Poems are deeper than history.
Some things flow deeper than poetry.
I have loved the sea.

Stencil stilt legs racing the slapping waves,
I dart in taking food as I can
The vee of my feet marking where I ran.

My color the brown of sand water slapped,
White stripes on my wings echo
The waves' glistening crests.

The ocean roars or gurgles
Sea gulls mew their defiant shrieks.
I keep silent racing life and tide.

That which calls itself mankind
Calls me sand piper;
Yet I play no tune.

Aaron Sinkovich

The Saxman

I slipped into the night with the shadows
and crept back to that alley where I heard the saxman
blowing slow jazz through the thick air
to the keen cats beneath his window.

Inspired by Andrea and acid

we keep ourselves divided
by quarantining each of us off to a man.

we are willowy and flowery
weak and encapturing
silence begets silence
that is only the beginning
and the dilution of our
power.

dilution = delusion
that is the front and the
way to *art* or hide our
meaning what we are really
doing.

I am the end all and be all
to who I answer to

I am complete and can feel / sense everything in me
in order to know.

Mommy mommy, can I have some more. boys
come out the womb. All they want is to come back in, to be
babied, and to feel safe. Grow up.
Make the outside world safe. When they come in
they just want to come
out again. It is our
power to say when and where, if! they come
out. And if they come
in; How can a child subjugate authority?

Desperation

The serpent lovers entwine
slow moving and soft like hot wax
their skin would manipulate anyone's vision
an illusion of rough, coarse action
the snakes' scales glide as effortlessly
as the weather changes
miles of overlapping scales
to surprise any cool breeze
steaming as they caress each other's silky scales
every touch a reunion
the way sparks scurry about with the strike of a match
smells of burning flesh linger from their memory
invisible from the serpents' tongues
every breath of this union
makes the sting more enjoyable
bound together by desire
yet unaware that their mistaken true love
will later shed a new skin
to wither
the serpents' lust wafts
from their smoking motions
the sweet aroma of friction
sacred scents of sin tickles
casting a spell of spiralling frenzy
whirling souls of the coal ravish each other
flames are lost in the wind

Bedsprings

Groggily
I awake to the
sound of
bouncing bedsprings
from the room
next door

The guy upstairs
pounds on the floor
requesting silence
in the pre-dawn hours
but his plea
falls only on
deaf ears and
mine

I pop two
sleeping pills
and cram the pillow
over my head
praying
that early morning
lovers
will call it a
night

Ruth Rawson

Nocturnal

Awake

aware of being awake
the a.m. dot glows beside the 4:30
bladder uncomplaining
first class eleven,
why awake now?

Turn in sleep-toasted bed, thinking,
disturbing, dislodging sleeping cat
slowly remember
Hale-Bopp, "natural wonder,
sight to be seen best between 4:30-5:30 a.m."

Uncovered face chilled by room's temperature,
blanketed body snuggled in warm cocoon.
To see Hale-Bopp must leave bed,
how badly do I want
to see this natural wonder?
Next pass too long to wait.
If move quickly can go look
and return to bed with
personal view of phenomena.

Pull slipper sox on in bed,
step into robe while leaving room.
The stairs, a dark descent by feel;
no need to wake the others
contented with media pictures.

Slipping on coat, boots, hat and gloves,
step onto porch, shivering,
surrounded by cold,
step down to ground,
look up at overcast sky;
only visible lights
belong to humans

Awake

bladder full
stumble to bathroom
returning, remember Hale-Bopp.
Darcy wants out.
She needs stairs lit for descending,
as Llapso Alpso, seeing is difficult—
even with her crew cut.
I accompany her out
into the starless night.

Awake

aware of being awake
lift curtain, no stars visible,
Hale-Bopp will keep,
mentally list what needs to be done.
Get up and begin completing tasks.

Awake

time unknown
contented cat asleep on my back
identity of cat unknown.
Mentally review chore lists,
smaller today,
still unaccomplished:
See Hale-Bopp.

If reach for curtain
will disturb cat.

George bites when suddenly woken.
Is the Hale-Bopp comet,
this natural wonder,
worth being bitten over?
No, George can leave fang marks
through three thick blankets
and a sock.

Hurrying through the numbing cold
past darkened buildings already locked,
I had to leave with outline incomplete;
Library closed now.
Glance at stars,
light-points scattered
across velvet night,
Hale-Bopp hovering over my car
like a beacon torch.

Ghost

She walks unseen
On silent, driven path.
Ice-peaked rivers
Unperceived as frost's chill grasp
Run slowly through throbbing veins,
Lifeless chains
Of envy,
All unseen.

Shadowed pain
Aimless wanders,
Endless wonders
Why the cornered, death does claim.

Shameless she wanders,
Searching cold river's edge.
Drowning, drowning
In wind-blown heathers and sage.
Dance gently... sanity's edge
Crumbles swiftly,
As dreams
Yet unseen
Mount unyielding.

...The people looked for the moon (in the sky) to pray to it/her/Luna. As the days and years and moments of the Eternal Now went by, the sky kept getting more crowded with the strange humanmade/manmade electric lights. (Yes, they mostly were *man* made as the society around them became more patriarchal—except when they decided to hire women for the low paying, low skill monotonous factory jobs—and they called this "progress" women's rights—right to be like society says is right—which being a patriarchal society, what is "right" is the male straight trait qualities.) So, the sky got crowded with the artificial lights and it became harder and harder to find the moon. (They had lost their intuitive power of discerning and forgotten, or *forgotten their belief in*, divination so they couldn't find the moon that way.) Finally the people didn't know which one was the moon so they didn't know What to pray to. And instead of saying "Luna, Luna, Luna, Diana, Bless Me, Bless Me, Bless Me, Diana," they chanted "O Man Made lights of the Sky how powerful we must be to produce you. While there was only one moon, WE have the whole sky lit up constantly." The people were sad and cried but they just prayed to whatever was up there the electric lights.

Chapter 2

After the people had raped and pillaged, plundered Gaia to tatters (of chemical waste?), their clever s-elves decided it would be wise to use their primitive space travel knowledge to go on to other planets (in the solar system). So they got highways & byways & roadsides up there in the sky, concrete and all for their little space cars & turned the Milky Way into ONE BIG CITY. Well, there were so many lights up there with different energy they had acquired and people had put into it that *astrologically* they started to affect everything like the stars used to. So instead of people being born with the Sun in Aries, they would be born with Light #232 on Highway 66 at some graph point in space. And the dead artificial energies/lights affected what used to be life. People and the *Universe* became more like Machines that were predictable and would wear out, static & bureaucratic (dogmatic-WASP—you know Protestant, etc.). JAHend

The Colors I Saw

As I was walking down the street, I walked up some stairs into a red building block of brick. And as I went into this building of red, I came upon a blue tortoise shell drawing mathematical equations in the tiles of the ceiling. I said, in a voice that had no sound, "What is the vector of my walk here, if I started with Red?" The tortoise, now a greenish shade of b sharp, replied as a wind chime. "White," it said, as it proved that distance equaled average velocity times time, "or black. Whichever is both or neither, and neither is both." As my brain boiled in the subarctic smell of magenta snow, I realized that the floor was a river and my feet were canoes. I tried to get the people in the canoes to paddle, but they all fell off after one jumped. It would have been all right, except that they were tied together with a shoestring. As I watched them sink into the tiles, I grabbed at them but my hands had gone insubstantial, so I crossed the river instead. I came upon a bank of grass and, as I walked through the blades, they cut my legs and I bled the blue of arterial blood. The swords and daggers flashed in the sun and I realized that the red was the dead trying—unsuccessfully—to hear what the tortoise had said. I knew that this wasn't where I should taste the color that I couldn't touch, so I walked on to find a place where I knew who I thought my grasshopper wanted to be. When I got there I saw a kangaroo tracing the structure of a glucose molecule with its tail. As I jumped upon the yellow brick road, I asked it, in a wordless whisper, "How do I get where I started at red, if where I am tastes of yellow and doesn't have a tone?" His tail thumped an answer in Morse Code, but I couldn't decipher the air—though the sound was in my hair and it had a mind of my own. I didn't know what it was that I saw, so I climbed to the top of a tree the color of night and hung from the roots by my toes. I couldn't see where the road ended, but I knew where the middle was. As a green tinted raven the size of a field mouse swam by on fins of light, I hitched a ride and jumped upon his back. As we got near to where I wasn't, I began to slide down his tail and wound up in the beak. As his teeth ground down upon me, I swam out its ear

and fell with a feather at the same speed. We floated as if in a vacuum until I fell asleep in a bed of flowers. I tried to pull a pillow under my head but it turned into a cloud and sank into the ground. Since there was nothing else around, my hands drug me away. My toes didn't want to leave so they dug furrows in the carpet and disturbed a gopher who was trying to prove that $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$ and that D^2 didn't exist. I apologized for disturbing his home. And, speaking only in a monotone, he asked me if I knew what my shadow understood? So, as I stood up, I talked in sign language to my opposite, watching as my hands took on a mind of someone else's and made odd symbols in the shadows. He answered with a light that was dark, and told me what I couldn't remember to do. So, after I asked my shadow, I went to the source and yelled at myself. I reached in my pocket and pulled out a crayon the color of nothing with the taste of it all. As I held it in my hand, it looked at me and said, in a deep throaty voice, "Have you reached where you wanted without passing GO?" I scribbled the answer on the walls of the box and watched as the writing ran down the walls and coated the ceiling, heading straight for the door. My eyes turned around in my head—so that I could see that I was not dead—and a wind chime made a noise that had no words as an orange tortoise drew a carbon-to-carbon double bond in the sand that was now red. "Perhaps now that you're at the color you started from you'll understand that what you saw was not who they listened to." The chimes rang on, and I realized that where I was didn't have a thing to do with where I was not.

A Ride Home

The soft hum of the car's engine was the only audible sound in its interior. Outside, the blanket of night had smothered the earth. Large trees loomed over the road secluding it from the lights of any suburban town that PA Route 422 passed. It was amazing to the man inside the car how this busy road, which he had just connected to, became so desolate in only a few miles.

Civilization found its way back to the man's view as he exited the road onto a ramp and met a traffic light. Ahead of him was the place our forefathers found refuge from the cold winter nights of the Revolutionary War. The light changed to green and the man proceeded past a "Valley Forge" sign and onto Route 17. The road was lonely and empty.

The lines that painted the scene began to fade as he approached a less traveled section of road. The foliage around became thicker, letting only slight rays of light through. To the left he passed an old cottage that George Washington may have slept in years ago, to the right a bunker that his men may have traversed. He passed an empty parking lot, then another lot with one car. Its windows were steamed.

Going deeper down the road took him away from the attractions and historical sites. The light reflecting off the moon escaped the barrage of trees and glimmered off his rear-view mirror. He caught a glimpse of himself in that uncanny illumination, but quickly looked away. He hated the way he looked more than he hated his personality. His dark semi-curly hair repulsed him. He was the only man in America to wish he were going bald. His eyes set him apart from a normal man; they were locked deep into his skull, giving the perception of smaller, darker eyes. He stared at his eyes and noticed they began to glow, slightly at first, then dramatically. He turned to see that far behind, another car had appeared on the road. The man was annoyed. "What the hell are they doing on this road, then again, what the hell am I doing on this road?"

His thoughts began to drift through the endless seas of his

mind. They came upon some flotsam that brought back the image of that note. White, with green crayon letters, "Come home to me" scribbled across the page. The envelope had no return address and had been post-marked in Pennsylvania. The memory made his eyes twitch and the hairs on his face rise.

The lights behind had intensified; the man flipped the button on the rear-view mirror deflecting the glare. Although he was intently watching the road ahead, in his mind's eye he saw an endless table outlined by a golden bar. On the other end, exactly opposite of his position was a woman dressed in short pants and a flimsy shirt. His attention focused on her choice of dress on this cold September night, and then slid to the curves of her bosom. Her apparel suggested she was interested in attention, but her demeanor polluted this hypothesis. Her shyness and simplicity were evident in her attitude toward the numerous pot-bellied slobs who played their hands in foreplay. She refused them all, even the slightly intelligent looking ones. She reminded him of someone.

When she left the establishment, he finished his drink and followed. Holding the door for her he noticed another oddity, her smell. It was clearly a man's cologne, his own brand, but was it her taste that chose this inexpensive scent? Her face, too, was different at such a close range. Mascara, eye shadow, and blush mixed together in pools under her eyes, then slid down her face meeting again at her chin. Her nose was red and she sniffed once before exiting.

He followed her for a few blocks and then in a deserted area announced his presence.

"Mary?"

She turned looking at him confusedly then asked, "Were you talking to me?"

"Yes, it is you Mary, how can this be?"

"I'm sorry, I'm not her. My name's Jessica." She had stopped walking and was looking right at him. One of the streetlights went out.

"You knew I was coming didn't you, that's why the door was open." She was nervous now; he was close enough to grab.

"Like I said, wrong person, sorry." She turned and walked

away quickening her pace slightly. She turned once more but the man was gone. She reached the door to her apartment building, unlocked it, and stepped inside. She had just clicked the light on when she was immediately thrust forward, falling over the chair she bought at Levit's. Hitting the ground, she let out a loud yelp that reverberated off the walls.

The man noticed the faces on the wall as he started to cut into her stomach. They went up the wall in a diagonal row, assorted people, and places, posing and in candid shots. The highest one was a tall man with grayish hair wearing a white shirt. The intruder's show improved for the pictures; he became their jester, and her anatomy became his props. They watched, intently smiling as his spectacle went on. He left the apartment with a red hue to the walls and furniture.

The night air around the car was thick; above him luminous clouds gathered to drain themselves on the earth. Far in front of him a bolt of lightning blazed through the night. Soon it would rain, but hopefully he would be home before the deluge.

The car behind had turned off the road, but eventually another appeared in the rearview mirror showing those same lights that he had seen before. His eyes began to itch from the lack of sleep the long journey had allowed. He tried to concentrate on the road, but only saw the blackness, reminding him of a long flight of stairs drenched in shadows.

She had just thrown an object down the stairs and left the doorway, slamming it behind. For a second her image was distinguishable; she was wearing all black with a veil in front of her eyes. The item toppled down the stairs like a bouncing ball. It came to rest at the foot of an eight-year-old boy who was already reaching for it. The boy walked across the abysmal floor following a path he had traveled many times. He dropped down onto a springless mattress to inspect the morsel. A half-eaten apple that, even through the dim illumination, the boy could see had begun to turn brown.

The room reeked of human excrement and mold. There was no outlet for relieving himself; his "toilet" was an unfrequented corner

that eventually became a home for the rats. His relief for their continuous scratching was a small radio with a little red light he discovered behind some boxes. He listened to the voices, always passing music stations, for only the sound of human voices interested him. The boy nodded his head, lulled by the voices and found himself talking directly to the faces behind the voices, like they were trapped in that basement with him.

"And in sports, the Flyers finally beat the New Jersey Devils six to one, taking first place in the Eastern Division."

"Was it your fault too? What did you do to him?"

"Brind'Amour, Desjardins, and Lindros each had goals."

"I shouldn't have been in there, now he's gone."

"And John LeClair registered his 3rd hat trick of the season."

Remembering his life as a child also brought back memories of that knife he found in a box. When he looked at the knife in the shallow light, the boy could see his own reflection on the surface. Convoluted by the engraving on the blade, his face always looked uncharacteristically morbid. Cold gray cheeks outlined his lifeless, blue lips—eyes staring directly back into his own. The boy cringed away from the image, immediately trying to forget the scene.

In his memory, he arose from the dusty mattress and paused, listening to the sounds of his home. A rat scuttled in a corner. Somewhere far away, a fire siren blasted its announcement of a blaze. The boy had an impression that this would be his last memory of the place, his last time here.

At the foot of the stairs he paused again. Light penetrated the space between the door and the wall. Ascending the staircase, his eyes stared unwavering on the approaching light. His eyes were on fire. It was a pain that half led him on this journey and half pulled him back opting for sleep.

As his hand rested on the cold metal of the door-handle, his mind throbbed with anticipation, but the blank expression on his face illustrated his own effort in the situation. The door began to open as his mind became trapped in a shell of its own creating.

The next half of his journey was done with the boy totally blind. Faint images appeared and faded as he traveled through the long house. Blackness dissolved into a kitchen surrounded on two

sides by a waist high wall. Stainless steel hung from the ceiling in neatly arranged rows. The motionless overhead fan cast a shadow of a cross on the linoleum tiles. A refrigerator was humming in the corner as the boy passed by. His movements were mechanical. He turned and gazed up a long staircase in this unexplored section of the house.

The nostalgic scene mutated again. He now stood at the onset of an endless hallway. Pictures of people he would never see again decorated the walls. Bare feet sunk deep into a soft carpet that cushioned his footfalls. With snakelike silence he advanced unaware of the possible danger that existed behind that ultimate door. He clutched the knife tight in his fist; the blade shone in the darkness.

The door swung open revealing a dormant beast atop a king size bed. The boy reacted with haste, springing onto the bed and raising the knife high overhead. With a *whoosh* the knife came crashing down into his mother's throat. It struck her firmly in the larynx, ripping it in two and splitting the nerves surrounding it. Hot blood struck his face, causing him to wince, then smile. It rolled down his cheek and onto his lips. His tongue protruded outward soaking up the ambrosia, sampling its sweetness.

The woman shot up, knife still thrust into her neck making a garbling noise in her throat. She met the boy's eyes in amazement, then threw him off before clutching her neck. She rose onto her feet and was immediately sent reeling in pain. Blood trickled out of her lips and oozed down her chin. Finally, in a last dance with the knife, she fell. The blade was thrust deeper into her jugular and appeared at the nape of her neck. All motion in the room ceased, and the only sound was an overhead clock ticking away the seconds. The boy rested his head on the floor and lost consciousness. His last waking vision was his mother's massive body lying unnaturally across from him.

The man's attention snapped back into reality when he was forced to swerve to stay on the road. Sleep had come quickly; the man did not realize that he had been nodding his head for the last half-hour. Ahead there were only a few short miles before he

would finally be home, only a few more minutes.

The lights in the rearview mirror had become brighter as the car in the rear threatened to overtake him. The man sped up. The atmosphere in the car was musty, almost foggy. He rolled down the window, attempting to bring relief to the stuffiness, but the currents of air that rushed in were cold and made him shiver. Raindrops pummeled the car and blurred his vision. The lights behind had come right up to the bumper of his car, but the man had been too worried about the rain to even see the approach. Again the man accelerated, pushing the car past speeds it was never meant to reach.

The car now became uncontrollable, shaking and swerving. The man was rushing down the road in bad weather that was only becoming worse as the rain came down harder. A patch of wet road sent the car reeling. He slammed on the break pedal attempting to stop the elipsing. The tires screamed in agony, begging to end the torment. One final turn sent the car off the road and onto a patch of grass.

The furious man threw the door open, falling to the muddied ground. He looked back and saw the lights approaching fast. "You bastards," he yelled standing up and walking directly in front of the lights' path. They approached fast, too fast for the man to react. He covered his eyes at the brilliance, and stood there like a deer. The lights rushed onto the man, pushing him over, and went through him staying on course. He looked behind him, saw the lights, and was confused. They were turning. The man knew they were coming back.

Dazed, he looked around for a safe haven, then got up and ran. His eyes focused on a point of light far off in the forest, as his thoughts strained to escape the oddity behind him, wondering why he was still alive.

Approaching the distant light he saw a faint silhouette of a house pressed against the backdrop of an ebony sky. His mind saw the house as a protection, and an aura of safety radiated off it.

Reaching the threshold, he crashed through the front door without announcing his presence. The place was furnished, but covered in dust. A small, desolated sofa lay overturned in the

corner and broken glass carpeted the floor. The paint was stripping off the walls revealing the naked house unprotected against nature and all her destructive forces.

The lights were approaching quickly from the distance; they had gone off the road and were pursuing the man. They were right at the front door now, and seemed to go through it, into the house, entering through dissolving walls.

He ran upstairs, trying to escape. The floor had turned a yellowish-brown through the years, and some of the pictures fell from their hangings on the wall. At the top of the stairs, the place began to look familiar, and the door at the end of the hall made his heart race.

His surroundings were now evident, as visions of a past invaded his thoughts. He had not blacked out as he remembered, but was completely coherent throughout the murder of his mother. After she had fallen, she had not died. He had climbed her large body and again brought the knife up and thrust it down into her stomach, ripping upward, splitting her open from her abdomen to her gullet. He had visions of a boy climbing into a woman's innards, spilling blood out of her silent carcass. His body slipped in like a worm into the mud and he clutched onto her heart. Hate had taken control now, had driven him to grab the still beating heart and shred it from its natural position. He held the heart in his hand looking at it, watching her life unravel in his hands. He brought the heart up to his face and began mauling it with his teeth. He swallowed large chunks of muscle that made up her existence. Blood covered the boy's mangled face as he sneered at the mess that was once his mother.

The man's face burned with the memory. He ran to a bathroom, but splashing water on his sweat soaked face did nothing to clean the bloody image in his mind. He was mumbling incoherent words and sentences, screaming into his hands. Lifting his head, he met his eyes in the cracked mirror above the sink. They bulged at the image, repulsed and confused. The mirror contorted and he saw a light peering back at him, from inside him.

The dim overhead light exploded into a million jagged pieces

of glass, which came crashing down onto his head. A flash of lightning illuminated the room for one split second. He ran out of the room and slid down the staircase heading toward the door. He went back to his car, back to the place where he had confronted those lights. The pain in his eyes was overwhelming, almost causing him to faint. He saw them, coming the same as before. This time the man would stand up to them, he would not fall. The lights approached fast, just as before, only this time they were followed by a loud ringing. The image ahead was not those same lights, but a very real truck that was stuck in a collision course with the man.

Shaking, the man watched his own image rushing at him in a mirror made by the truck's grill. He watched his eyes watching his eyes. The remorseless man, who had taken the lives of so many people, now begged for his own. In his last seconds, he pleaded to God for forgiveness, begging for penance without sorrow. The image of himself, now only inches away, smiled. Then the truck hit.

How To Toughen Up Little Kids

Eric heard him calling from upstairs. His face went pale. Shaking a bit, he looked at his mother. She smiled because she knew he was afraid. It was a caring smile. She said, "Don't worry, Eric, just go up and see what Grandpa wants." He didn't move. He just stood there with his mouth open, shaking his head. "Go on. He's not going to hurt you," she said pleasantly.

He managed to stifle out a little, "No."

His mother put her hands on her hips, cocked her head off to one side, and said, much more firmly this time, "Go." Eric waited for another second and then slowly started to turn toward the family room. Each step was like lead, and he grimaced as if he was in pain. He felt like he was being taken to the electric chair.

As he entered the family room, he heard his grandfather call again. "He's coming, Dad," my Mom said from the kitchen. He looked about the family room. His two older brothers were sitting on the couch, watching a rerun of *Green Acres*. Joe, the younger of the two, looked up and grinned. "Goin' to see Grandpa, huh? Don't get too close to his mouth, man. When I was younger he tried to bite my ear off. See the scar?" He turned his head quickly to reveal a small scar that looked like something had nibbled on it. Eric jumped back with a small squeal.

"You got that from a dog," said Greg, next to Joe. "Eric don't worry about Grandpa. He's just a little weird. He is just trying to, I don't know, make a man out of you or something. You'll be all right. He did the same when thing to me and Joe, and we made it through just fine."

Yeah fine, hee, hee, hee, hee," Joe said crackling like a witch. Greg looked at him and smiled.

"Eric!" we heard from upstairs.

Greg said, "You'll be fine," and gave him a little push toward the stairs.

Joe jumped up on the couch, and looked at Eric wide-eyed, saying, "Don't go man. You're never going to make it." Greg hit Joe in the arm, and he shut up and looked at Greg, while angrily

rubbing his shoulder.

Greg looked at Eric and said, "Go on." He was now more afraid than before, but his brother's words gave him some comfort; so he started toward the stairs.

As he reached the stairs, his Grandpa bellowed from above, "Eric, come up here! I want to show you something."

Never in his life had Eric wanted to see anything his Grandfather has had to show him. He thought his Grandpa to be a bit psychotic. Grandpa was always trying to do things to toughen Eric up and "make him into a real man" as he would say. Eric, being eight and all, always saw these "toughening up" sessions as Grandpa trying to scare the crap out of him. Why, one time, he actually swallowed a gold fish in front of Eric and then offered him one.

These sessions always ended with Eric screaming and running to his mother, and then for some reason, he'd lose the ability to speak for a week or so. He always regained his powers of speech, though. Usually, just in time for another session. It's a vicious circle. To make things worse, all of our relatives think Eric to be a bit wimpy because Joe and Greg had never reacted the way Eric does. But you also need to take into account that Grandpa had many years practicing his "toughening up" on Eric's older brothers; so, now, it is like a well refined art form.

Eric took a deep breath and said to himself, "OK, OK, Greg's right. It's not that bad. I'm sure there are no gold fish up there. What can he do?" He made his way up the steps and poked his head into Grandpa's room. Grandpa was sitting at his desk, whittling on a piece of wood with a huge hunting knife. Eric timidly stepped inside the door.

Grandpa noticed him and turned around. "Ahh, Eric," he said, motioning toward him. "Come to Papa." Eric moved maybe a foot in the direction of the desk. Grandpa motioned more vigorously now, saying, "Come, come. Closer, closer." Eric came a little closer as Grandpa said, "You'll want to see this."

Grandpa put his bad leg in front of him. He had gotten gangrene or something in a war and had never had it checked out. Somehow it stopped, but not without leaving its mark on him. He

pulled off his boot, rolled back his sock, and placed the foot in front of Eric. Eric stood there, his eyes so wide you would have thought his eyeballs would have fallen right out of his head. Grandpa's entire big toe and a little bit of his second were as black as ink and looked so crusty and rigid that it seemed they should have fallen off from their own weight.

Grandpa, seeing Eric's shock, said, "Yep, yep that's my black toe. Can't feel it one bit. Nope not at all. Here let me show you." Grandpa picked up the hunting knife and with one swoop took the toe right off. He held it up to Eric, saying, "See, didn't hurt at all."

Eric screamed such a high pitched squeal that you never would have thought it came from a boy. He ran for the door, leaving Grandpa and his toe behind. Passing through the door, he tripped and hit the steps. He crawled down all twenty-five steps in about two seconds, all the while expelling that girlish wail. As he reached the bottom, he jumped up and flew into the arms of his mother, who was coming out of the kitchen.

Eric gripped her and shook visibly. His mother just hugged him back and yelled upstairs, "Dad, what did you do this time?"

"Oh nothing," he replied from his room. "Just toughening him up."

